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ABSTRACT

Some behavior modification textbooks encourage students to apply behavioral modification techniques in their own lives. This descriptive study using undergraduate students examined the usefulness of giving students in behavior modification courses the assignment to apply behavior modification techniques in their own lives. Subjects (N=50) were given assignments designed to give them the opportunity to use behavior modification techniques to bring about a change in a behavior important to themselves or to another individual. Students measured baseline occurrence of the behavior, selected one or more behavior modification techniques to change the behavior, implemented the techniques, recorded the behavior after implementing the techniques, and reported on the program and its outcome. Results indicated 46 of the 50 students were successful in bringing about a desired change. The results of a questionnaire given to 18 of the students indicated the students experienced the application as useful, tended to use behavior modification techniques other than for class assignments, and planned to use behavior modification techniques in the future. (ABL)

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Assigning Applications in Behavior Modification Courses

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This descriptive study examines the the usefulness of giving students in behavior modification courses the assignment to apply behavior modification techniques in their own lives. Fifty students at two universities were given assignments designed to give them the opportunity to use behavior modification techniques to bring about a change in a behavior important to themselves themselves or to another individual. Forty-six of the 50 students were successful in bringing about a desired change. The results of a questionnaire given to 18 of the students indicated that the students experienced the application assignments as being useful, tended to use behavior modification techniques other than for class assignments, and planned to use behavior modification techniques in the future.

Assigning Applications in Behavior Modification Courses

Some behavior-modification textbooks encourage students to apply behavioral-modification techniques in their own lives (e.g. Martin & Pear, 1988). There are several possible benefits to such assignments.

First, applying a behavior modification technique may help individuals make a desired change, improving their quality of life. Second, according to social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), if a behavior results in a positive outcome, it is more likely to be used in the future. Thus, if using behavior modification techniques for an assignment has positive results, students may be more likely to use the techniques outside the context of the classroom. Third, according to Bandura (1986) direct experience leads to effective encoding of information in memory. Thus, students might be better able to recall techniques they used themselves.

A descriptive study using undergraduate students from two universities examined the outcome of student behavior modification programs and students' use of behavior modification techniques other than for class assignments.

Method

Subjects

Eighteen undergraduate students in a college Behavior

Modification class in the Southeastern U.S. and 32 undergraduates in a Behavior Modification class in the Rocky Mountain area participated. Thirty-nine of the students were women.

Procedure

All fifty students were required to design and implement a behavior modification project intended to change a behavior in themselves or another. They were asked to select behaviors that were important or useful to themselves or another. If another individual's behavior was modified, that individual's prior consent was obtained. Students were assured that their grade for the project did not depend on the outcome of the program.

Students measured baseline occurrence of the behavior, selected one or more behavior modification techniques to change the behavior, implemented the techniques, recorded the behavior after implementing the techniques, and wrote a report describing the program and its outcome.

As well as being given the behavior-modification-program assignment, the 18 students attending the college in the Southeast were given an additional assignment. They were asked to apply five behavior modification techniques, specifically positive reinforcement, extinction, shaping, fading, and response or stimulus generalization. Students reported on the outcome of these applications in class.

At the end of the semester these 18 students were given a questionnaire that asked them to indicate anonymously whether they a) found the behavior modification program and the applications useful, b) used the techniques to modify behavior

other than for the program and the applications, c) would try to use the techniques in the future to change their own behavior, and d) would try to use the techniques in the future to change others' behavior.

Results

Twenty-four of the 50 students chose to modify another individual's behavior for their behavior modification program, 24 chose to modify one of their own behaviors, and two modified a pet's behavior. Twenty-one of the 24 other-individual modification programs led to a change in the desired direction, twenty-three of the 24 self-modification programs led to a change in the desired direction, and both animal-modification programs led to a change in the desired direction.

Successful programs designed to help another individual change a behavior focused on diverse behaviors such as reducing parroting of speech in an inpatient on a psychiatric ward, increasing a room-mates studying, helping children become less aggressive and more self-reliant, toilet training a child, and eliminating finger biting in a child with cerebral palsy. Successful self-modification programs focused on endeavors such as weight-loss, sports performance, smoking cessation, eliminating nail-biting, and increasing sales made at work. The two pet modification programs involved eliminating a dog's eating of grass which induced vomiting and leash-training a dog.

Some of the changes in behavior had a substantial impact on the individual's life. For example, one student decreased he. foster child's continual cursing that was alienating other

children and teachers. The decreased cursing resulted in very positive reactions from others and improved social adjustment in the child.

The results of the questionnaire given to the 18 students in the Southeast were as follows. Seventeen of the 18 students found doing the behavior modification program and applications useful. During the semester 15 of the students used behavior modification techniques other than for the class assignments. Seventeen of the students planned to try to use behavior modification in the future to change their own behavior and 17 planned to try to use behavior modification in the future to try to change others' behavior.

Discussion

The results of this descriptive study suggest that giving students the assignment to apply behavior modification techniques may lead to meaningful behavioral improvement in themselves or others. This improvement constitutes a notable educational outcome distinct from the customarily sought increase in knowledge. Students tend to perceive the techniques as useful, use them apart from class assignments, and plan to use them in the future. Instructors who are not already giving such application assignments may want to consider using them as a teaching tool.

References

Bandura, A. (1986). Social Foundations of Thought & Action. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Martin, G. & Pear, J. (1988). Behavior Modification. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.